

## SAF V Survey Report

### Deployment and Separation Adjustment among Army Civilian Spouses

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#### Background

Army families are experiencing significantly high rates of deployment, most recently because of our nation's Global War on Terror (GWOT). These deployments due to military operations are in addition to routine family separations due to other types of deployments, training exercises, unaccompanied tours, and other TDY separations. These separation experiences have potential impacts on the adjustments of Soldiers and members of their families. To assist in these adjustments, the Army provides an environment, as well as services, that are designed to promote positive adjustments and strengthen family well-being during the period of separation. This climate of support helps meet the objective of the Army Well-Being Strategic Plan that individuals in the Army attain a positive sense of well-being. It is recognized that these periods of separation are potentially stressful for families and that this stress can impact the readiness of the Soldier and his/her unit. Thus, it is in the best interests of the Army to promote positive deployment and separation adjustments among spouses and children.

#### Key Actions

- ❖ Increase unit and installation leader support for families during periods of separation.
- ❖ Promote opportunities for married couples to spend time together and strengthen their relationships.
- ❖ Increase opportunities for family members to develop friendship ties with each other.
- ❖ Build effective networks of spouses for support and to combat loneliness/isolation.
- ❖ Provide more opportunities for deployed Soldiers to return home for family connections.
- ❖ Strengthen Soldier and family confidence in Army support agencies.

#### Key Findings

- ❖ Over one-third (36%) of Army families are now or have recently experienced deployment of their member to a theater of operation.
- ❖ Half of these families are separated for 12 or more months out of 36 months.
- ❖ The greater the number of personal, social and Army assets present in the family, the better the deployment adjustment.
- ❖ Successful adjustment is highly associated with perceived supportiveness of Army leaders and use of Army agencies.
- ❖ Families with strong marriages and friendships adjust well to Army demands.

The objective of this report is to provide an analysis of how well Army civilian spouses are adjusting to deployment and separation demands, and how well the assistance provided to these families is supporting these adjustments. The level of family adjustment to separations is examined from the perspective of how well Army families acquire the personal, social and organizational assets they need to help them adapt to the stresses of separations.

#### Data Source

The U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC), in conjunction with the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI), has conducted Surveys of Army Families (SAFs) every 4 years or so to examine areas important to Army families. The most recent survey (SAF V) was conducted between September 2004 and January 2005. A previous survey (SAF IV) was conducted in April, 2001. This survey is one way to assess the effectiveness of the Army's Well-being Initiative.

Key questions related to deployment and separation experience and adjustment are included in each survey to permit tracking of trends and the identification of factors associated with personal and family adjustments. The 2004-2005 SAF was specifically designed to address these questions with 3 forms of the survey distributed. Form 1 was sent to spouses whose member was currently deployed to a theater of operation. Form 2 was sent to spouses whose member had been deployed to a theater of operation but had returned in the past 12 months. Form 3 was sent to other Army spouses. Data from these 3 survey forms were difficult to compare to earlier surveys due to the unique nature of current deployment patterns. For most analyses, data from the spouses with current or recent deployments are included. Data from other spouses are used for comparison purposes. Since the survey is conducted from a sample of Army spouses, any interpretation of the findings should take into account the sampling error (SEs). For this report the following SEs apply: overall sample = +/- 1%; officer spouses = +/- 2%; enlisted spouses = +/- 2%.

## Key Findings

The findings in this analysis are provided in three sections: (1) Deployment and Separation Experience; (2) Deployment Adjustments and (3) Support for Deployments and Separation

### *Deployment and Separation Experience*

In the 36 months prior to the current SAF V, 97% of Army spouses experienced a duty-related separation from their spouse (see Table 1). Using all the data from the 3 surveys and weighting them appropriately, 4 groups are defined: 1) Spouses with a currently deployed member, 2) spouses with a member who returned from a theater of operation in the past 12 months, 3) spouses who have experienced a separation but not a deployment to a theater of operation, and 4) spouses who have not experienced a separation. The following are key findings from this analysis:

- ★ 17% of spouses had a family member currently deployed to a military operation
- ★ OCONUS spouses had the highest rates of current deployment (27%)
- ★ One-third of spouses (36%) had experienced a current or recent military operation deployment
- ★ Spouses of enlisted (19%) report higher rates of current deployment compared to officers (13%)
- ★ The majority (61%) of spouses have experienced separations but not to military operations

	Now Deployed	Deployed, Returned	Not Deployed, Some Separation	Not Deployed, No Separation
Officer	13	13	72	2
O1-O3	17	19	62	2
O4-O6	9	7	81	3
Enlisted	19	20	58	3
E1-E4	21	21	55	4
E5-E6	20	23	54	3
E7-E9	13	14	70	4
Warrant Officer	16	18	64	2
CONUS	15	20	61	3
OCONUS	27	11	58	3
<b>Overall</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>3</b>

Compared to the deployments experienced by spouses during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield (1991), the current rates of exposure to deployment under GWOT are slightly higher (See Table 2). The same questions were asked during both periods, allowing a comparison of rates. Key findings include:

- ★ 32% of spouses experienced a deployment in 1991 compared to 36% in 2004
- ★ Spouses living OCONUS are more likely to experience a deployment today (38%) than in 1991 (27%)
- ★ Spouses of enlisted personnel are more likely to report a deployment (38% vs. 33%), especially in the junior and mid enlisted grades. The increase among officers is not significant.

Table 2. Percent Experiencing Deployment in Past 36 Months—2004 vs. 1991		
	2004	1991
Officer	25	24
O1-O3	36	32
O4-O6	16	16
Enlisted	38	33
E1-E4	41	34
E5-E6	42	35
E7-E9	26	26
Warrant Officer	34	41
CONUS	35	36
OCONUS	38	27
<b>Overall</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>32</b>

Among the spouses whose member deployed for a military operation, over half (51%) experienced 12 or more months of separation over the previous 36 month period (see Table 3). One in eight (13%) spouses were apart from the member half or more of those 36 months. Key findings include:

- ★ Spouses of officers were less likely to experience longer deployments due to military operations
- ★ The length of deployments was not substantially influenced by CONUS or OCONUS status
- ★ Deployment related separations of 12 months or more are most likely for mid to senior grade enlisted personnel or warrant officers (57% for each)

Table 3. Number of Months Deployed for Military Operations, Last 36 Months				
	0 to 5 Months	6 to 11 Months	12 to 17 Months	18 to 36 Months
Officer	11	45	36	8
O1-O3	10	45	37	8
O4-O6	12	45	32	10
Enlisted	7	41	38	13
E1-E4	9	51	34	6
E5-E6	6	36	41	16
E7-E9	7	36	39	18
Warrant Officer	7	36	38	19
CONUS	8	42	37	13
OCONUS	7	40	42	11
<b>Overall</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>13</b>

### Deployment Adjustments

After taking into consideration all the family transitions a deployment requires, it is important to understand the consequences of these separations for the spouses and families involved. The SAF V survey asked spouses who had recently experienced or were now experiencing a deployment how well they had coped or were now coping. Among those with this experience, 50% of those

Table 4. Percent of Spouses Coping While Member Away on Most Recent Deployment		
	Deployed	Deployed, Returned
Officer	66	70
O1-O3	64	67
O4-O6	71	77
Enlisted	48	51
E1-E4	39	41
E5-E6	50	53
E7-E9	61	66
Warrant Officer	59	61
CONUS	50	54
OCONUS	52	54
<b>Overall</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>54</b>

now experiencing a deployment say they are coping well or very well. In comparison, 54% of those whose spouse has now returned report having coped well or very well during the deployment (see Table 4). Other findings from this analysis include:

- ★ Deployment coping is consistently better for officer spouses (66% and 70%) compared to enlisted spouses (48% and 51%)
- ★ Younger spouses of junior grade personnel cope significantly less well than spouses of more senior officer and enlisted personnel

- ★ There are no substantial differences in overall coping rates among spouses in CONUS compared to OCONUS
- ★ It would appear that perceptions of coping improve over time for about 4% of spouses since now returned spouses report having coped better than currently separated spouses (or it may be that current spouses are coping slightly less well than those with earlier separations)

Spouses with a returned member and those with no recent deployment to a theater of operation were asked to indicate how well they would be able to cope with a separation of different lengths and obligations. The findings are clear: spouses are confident that they can manage shorter-term separations but they expect much more difficulty with separations of 3 or more months (see Table 5). Specific findings include:

Table 5. Percent of Spouses Able to Cope when Member is Away				
	Deployed, Returned		Not Deployed, Separated	
	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted
Less than a Month	97	95	96	94
1 to 2 Months	94	90	89	87
3 to 6 Months	71	66	68	62
7 to 12 Months	40	36	42	37
More than a Year	23	22	27	24
Undetermined Length	15	14	18	15

- ★ Fewer than half of spouses expect to have no problem or only a slight problem coping with separations of 7 months or more.
- ★ Even spouses who have already experienced a deployment expect to have moderate to serious problems coping in the future.
- ★ About one in four spouses believe they can cope with absences of a year or more.
- ★ Spouses of enlisted personnel are only slightly more worried about coping than officer spouses.
- ★ Compared to spouses without recent deployment experience, those who have experienced deployments expect to adjust better to short-term separations but less well to longer separations.
- ★ Not noted on Table 5 but there is a continuing decline in the percent of spouses who believe they can cope well with separations of one year or more. This rate was 35% in 1995, 30% in 2001 and now is 24% overall and 22% for those who have recently experienced a deployment.

Another way of assessing separation adjustment is by examining the personal, relational, and organizational adjustments among spouses who have experienced, or are now experiencing, deployments and separations. This analysis is presented in Table 6 and it examines 6 indicators of separation adjustment, 4 indicators of family adjustment, 8 indicators of personal adjustment and 2 indicators of Army adjustment. This analysis indicates that spouses are coping quite well on some dimensions but not as well on others. Key findings include:

- ★ Highest adjustments occur among spouses who have experienced separations but not deployments to a theater of operation
- ★ Spouses with current deployments are experiencing the poorest adjustment rates on most indicators
- ★ Spouses typically cope with internal family issues best but have more problems with adjusting to family household roles and responsibilities
- ★ About two in three spouses report good personal adjustments, although the areas of managing their own health and handling loneliness are more likely to be difficult. Three in four spouses do not report difficulties with finances

- ★ The greatest personal challenges for spouses come from the deployments themselves, with about half saying they are coping well and the majority worried about their spouse being in combat and having to be redeployed after returning
- ★ Among spouses with recent deployment experience, two-thirds feel that their family adjusts well to Army demands but only half are satisfied with the Army as a way of life

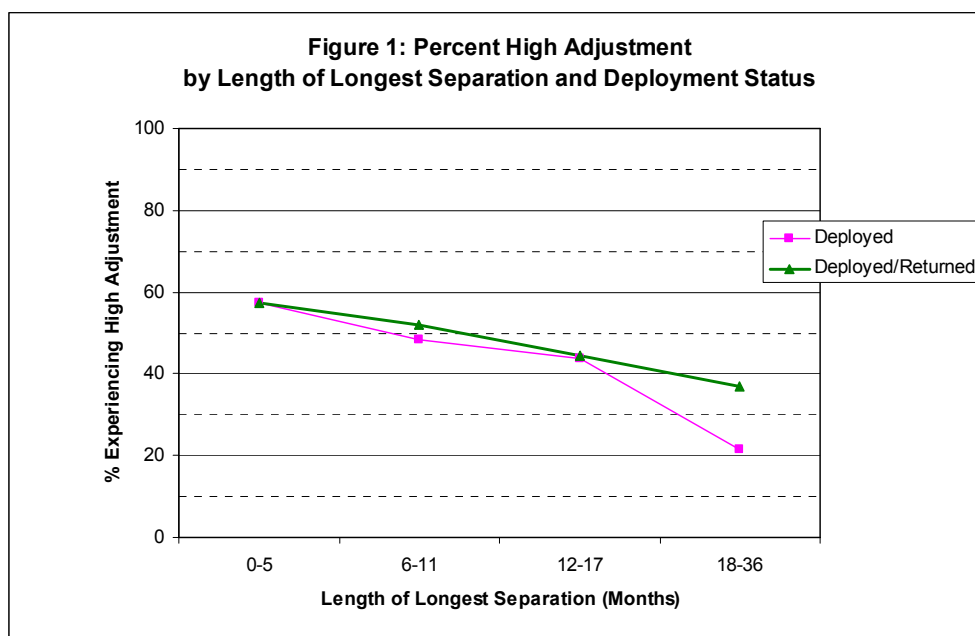
<b>Table 6: Deployment and Spouse Adjustment: Deployment/Separation Experience Comparison (% with high adjustment)</b>			
<b>Separation Adjustment</b>	<b>Deployed</b>	<b>Deployed, Returned</b>	<b>Not Deployed. Separated</b>
Coped well during current/most recent deployment	53	54	na
Satisfied with deployments/time away from home	9	11	29
Little problem if possibility spouse will be in combat	28	28	37
Little problem if possibility spouse will be peacekeeping	48	47	53
Little problem coping if spouse redeployed after returning	18	23	33
No serious financial problems because of deployment	81	81	na
<b>Family Adjustment</b>			
Managed household tasks well	63	70	75
Managed financial matters well	75	79	81
No marital problems in last 6 mos.	80	74	81
No family violence problems in last 6 mos.	98	96	98
<b>Personal Adjustment</b>			
Managed own health well	56	61	73
Handled loneliness well	36	36	58
Personally satisfied	83	85	87
Little problem with day to day stresses	68	75	77
Little problem getting along when spouse away	64	65	71
No emotional problems in last 6 mos.	63	66	72
No drug/alcohol problems in last 6 mos.	93	91	95
No financial problems in last 6 mos.	80	71	75
<b>Army Adjustment</b>			
Family adjusts to Army demands well	66	65	73
Satisfied with Army as a way of life	50	51	61

Another way to examine spouse adjustment patterns is to compare the adjustment rates among those who have experienced different amounts of family separation in the past 36 months. The data on Table 7 demonstrate adjustment levels for those spouses whose members were deployed to an Army theater of operation. As might be expected, the spouses with the fewest months of separation reported the highest adjustment on these indicators and there is a trend toward lower levels of adjustment with increased months of separation. A few adjustment indicators do not change significantly over time. Other findings on this analysis include:

- ★ Separation adjustment indicators that decline the greatest with months apart include satisfaction with deployment patterns (20% to 5%), perceptions of coping well (57% to 50%) and re-deployment coping (24% to 19%)
- ★ Most spouse family adjustments decline marginally over time but managing household tasks well declines the greatest (73% to 64%)
- ★ Personal adjustments decline the greatest over time separated, especially in the areas of health management (65% to 53%) and handling loneliness (40% to 34%) and emotional problems (69% to 60%)
- ★ Overall adjustments to the Army do not change dramatically due to amounts of separation although satisfaction with the Army as a way of life is lower (48%) for those with more than 18 months of separation compared to those with less than 6 months (53%)

<b>Table 7: Current or Recent Deployment Experience and Spouse Adjustment: By No. of Months Deployed in last 36 for Military Operations (% with high adjustment)</b>				
	<b>0-5 Mo.</b>	<b>6-11 Mo.</b>	<b>12-17 Mo.</b>	<b>18-36 Mo.</b>
<b>Separation Adjustment</b>				
Coped well during current/most recent deployment	57	54	53	50
Satisfied with deployments/time away from home	20	11	8	5
Little problem if possibility spouse will be in combat	30	28	28	27
Little problem if possibility spouse will be peacekeeping	46	48	47	46
Little problem coping if spouse redeployed after returning	24	21	20	19
No serious financial problems because of deployment	82	81	81	78
<b>Family Adjustment</b>				
Managed household tasks well	73	66	67	64
Managed financial matters well	78	77	77	75
No marital problems in last 6 mos.	79	79	76	72
No family violence problems in last 6 mos.	96	98	97	97
<b>Personal Adjustment</b>				
Managed own health well	65	59	58	53
Handled loneliness well	40	36	34	34
Personally satisfied	86	84	85	81
Little problem with day to day stresses	72	71	74	69
Little problem getting along when spouse away	66	65	64	62
No emotional problems in last 6 mos.	69	65	65	60
No drug/alcohol problems in last 6 mos.	92	93	91	90
No financial problems in last 6 mos.	74	75	76	74
<b>Army Adjustment</b>				
Family adjusts to Army demands well	66	67	66	63
Satisfied with Army as a way of life	54	51	50	48

While the accumulation of separations can influence the adjustment of Army families, adjustment levels can also be affected by the length of any one separation that the spouse experiences. When this is examined (no Table provided), we find that long, continuous separations have a greater negative effect on families than the sum of shorter separations. For example, 39% of spouses with 18 or more months of continuous separation say they coped well during that time compared to 50% of spouses who experienced separations that together accumulated to 18 or more months in the past 36 months. Similarly, money management problems were more challenging (62% doing well compared





to 79%), emotional health less satisfactory (48% doing well compared to 60%) and marital problems were more frequent (59% doing well compared to 72%). This also influenced attitudes toward the Army with these extended-absence families reporting less family adjustment to Army demands (47% compared to 63%) and less satisfaction with Army life (37% compared to 48%). This drop in adjustment rates for those with longer separations is reflected on Figure 1. The rates of adjustment are especially low for those who are currently experiencing a long, unbroken separation due to deployment to a theater of operation.

### ***Support for Deployments and Separations***

One way to assess the underlying factors that are associated with separation adjustments is to examine the organizational, social, and personal assets that people can actually use to help them cope with demands, such as the absence of a spouse because of deployment. These assets are attributes of the person or their environment that can provide resources during times of stress and challenge. They can consist of personal and family strengths, or practical sources of help from formal or informal systems of support that promote well-being. The approach used here to examine the factors related to positive adjustments assumes that people who take advantage of assets that are available will be better able to cope successfully and sustain their resilience. This analysis of assets can also help Army leaders better develop strategies for improving separation adjustments by targeting resources toward those assets that return the greatest benefit to Army families.

The analysis of assets and deployment adjustment among spouses who are experiencing, or have recently experienced, a deployment is provided on Table 8. Comparisons are made between those who indicated they were coping very well with their current or recent deployment and those who were coping poorly or very poorly. The data clearly indicate that the spouses and families who have these assets are the most likely to adjust well after a duty-related separation, in this case a deployment to a theater of operation. The difference score column offers a quick summary of how much difference in adjustment can be attributed to each of the assets listed in the Table.

The findings from this analysis of assets and deployment adjustment indicate:

- ★ Knowledge and use of Army support assets are especially key to spouse deployment adjustment. Being comfortable dealing with Army agencies is helpful for successful coping.
- ★ Spouses who regularly get information from their Army member and keep themselves informed cope much more readily.
- ★ Experience with the military does not contribute a great deal to adjustment, but believing that the Army respects spouses and families does.
- ★ The belief that Army leaders at the installation and unit levels are concerned about families is a major predictor of spouse adjustment.
- ★ Belief that the Army is an economically secure environment is important with higher adjusted spouses more satisfied with the pay and benefits of the member's Army job.
- ★ Having a strong marriage during and after the deployment is highly linked to adjustment. This was much more important than the rating of the marriage prior to the deployment.
- ★ Being connected to a support network is another key, especially having friends, neighbors and a clergy person to contact with issues and problems. Being involved in volunteer work is also important.
- ★ Increased use of Army support services during the deployment contributes only marginally to adjustment, when compared to many of the other assets reviewed.

- ★ Spouses with lower deployment adjustments were more likely to have participated in AFTB and increased their attendance in a faith community. This participation may have helped to stall an even further decline in their personal and relational adjustments.
- ★ Factors that also contributed little to successful adjustment included being employed, having a college education and communicating often with the Soldier during the deployment.

<b>Table 8: Presence of Personal and Social Assets and Success in Coping with Deployments (% reporting asset)</b>			
<b>Army-Related Assets</b>	<b>Coped Very well</b>	<b>Coped Poorly</b>	<b>Difference (High-Low)</b>
Comfortable dealing with Army agencies	78	41	37
Comfortable with Army medical system while spouse away	88	60	28
Know where to get emergency assistance	90	73	17
(Keep self) well informed about Army	85	63	22
Soldier keeps spouse well informed about Army	87	73	14
Experience with military	50	60	-10
Satisfied with respect Army shows spouses	43	18	24
<b>Leadership Assets</b>			
Satisfied with concern of spouse's unit for families	43	17	26
Satisfied with high post leaders' concern for family	39	16	21
Satisfied with unit officers' concern for family	42	20	22
Satisfied with unit NCOs' concern for family	46	24	21
<b>Personal Assets</b>			
Does regular volunteer work	86	33	53
At least some college education	69	59	10
<b>Financial Assets</b>			
Employed full/part time	47	39	8
Satisfied with spouse's pay and allowances	56	28	28
Satisfied with security and stability of spouse's job	85	64	22
<b>Social Assets</b>			
Participation in AFTB	73	86	-13
Participated in FRG in last 12 months	68	56	12
Have person outside home to talk to	76	38	38
Willing to turn to neighbor, friend or family member for help	68	60	8
Increased attendance at church or synagogue during deployment	40	52	-12
Willing to turn to religious leader for help	53	41	13
<b>Family Assets</b>			
Satisfied with marriage at present time	83	63	20
Satisfied with marriage before spouse deployed	81	79	2
Communicated often by telephone during current/most recent deployment	30	27	3

When all 26 of these assets are summed across all dimensions, it is clear that the greater the number of assets held by a family, the greater the level of personal, family and Army adjustment. The data representing this are found in Figure 2, which includes a comparison for spouse's currently experiencing deployment and those with recent deployment experience. There is a clear linear relationship between the number of personal and social assets reported by the spouses in both groups and the percentage of families who indicate that they are adjusting well to duty related separations.

This analysis confirms that strengthening those assets with the greatest gaps between high and low adjusted spouses can pay off in building families who are better able to cope and adapt to the deployment demands of Army missions. For example, the data indicate that among spouses



with few personal and social assets, only 10% are adjusting well to separations. In contrast, over 90% of the spouses with nearly all of the assets listed reported that they adjusted well to recent and current deployments. This is strong evidence that there is a direct link between personal and social assets and the adjustment and well-being of Army families. During these times of worldwide tension, strengthening these assets should result in families who are better able to cope and adapt to the pressures and worries of having their spouses, fathers and mothers deployed.

The findings in this report indicate that the majority of Army spouses are adaptable and resilient but that extended separations, especially those that occur without periods of reunion, take a significant toll on spouse adjustment capabilities. The data indicate that personal and family adjustments are affected by deployments but that unit leadership support and engagement by Army support services are very important to adjustment capabilities. Also critical are the informal support systems within social support networks and within the couple's own marriage relationship. Strengthening these critical assets can pay significant dividends in family adjustment and support of the spouse for the Army lifestyle and mission.

